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ABSTRACT

The Crockett Therapeutic Wilderness Camp, a program designed as a remedial group treatment program for juvenile delinquents and conducted by the Texas Youth Council, is described. The review addresses the following areas: student population; camp life routines; treatment strategies; and program evaluation procedures. (HLM)

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WILDERNESS THERAPEUTIC CAMPING :

An Alternative Treatment Approach for the Juvenile Offender

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Juvenile delinquency, as a social problem, has been experienced by various societies throughout history. Plato, in his dialogue "Laws" considered the lawlessness of the youth of his day to be a distinct social problem. Early European society recognized the crimes of youth to be a costly problem; however, they did not see them as being different from the crimes of adults (Sanders, 1969). It was not until the early part of the 1800's that juvenile offenders were seen as qualitatively different from adults committing the same crime.

Today, delinquency has been identified as a paramount and growing social problem: a problem in need of an immediate and effective solution. The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice (1967) considers delinquency "...the single most pressing and threatening aspect of the criminal problem in the United States". Nearly 500,000 juveniles are jailed each year. Of those who enter a juvenile corrections facility, Sarri (1975) reports that the recidivism rate approaches seventy-five percent (75%). Most estimates, though, suggest a recidivism rate of about fifty percent (50%) (Lunden, 1964). Clearly, delinquency is a major social problem with no immediate solution.

Before any solution to the problem of Juvenile Delinquency can be proposed, it is necessary to understand the characteristics of the delinquent population. In addition to individual characteristics, there are other

variables (i.e., social influences) which should be considered in an attempt to understand Juvenile Delinquency. Ross (1974) states that delinquency occurs predominantly in high density population areas, and to a large extent appears to occur either with or in relation to a relevant peer group. Cotton and Fien (1973) consider the juvenile offender to be seeking excitement, an experience which almost always must be shared with others. Stealing, fighting, and acting out usually occur when relevant others are present.

In addition to delinquents being responsive to peer pressures, adjudicated delinquents are generally impulsive, goal directed, and from lower socioeconomic class backgrounds. David and Faldof (1975) indicate that delinquents are typically impulsive in their pattern of responding and give a limited amount of prior thought to an unlawful act. Delinquency is goal directed in that the pattern of behaviors chosen by the individual is rational, and the target is needs gratification (Rackman and Heller, 1972). In addition, the adjudicated delinquent is often from a lower socioeconomic class background and/or broken home. Also the delinquent (at least of those who are caught) is usually of below average intelligence.

Plato stated that "...the legislator must make the training of children no secondary or subordinate task..." and that the society needs to teach its youth proper moral values. From ancient times, though, until the recent past, youthful offenders have been treated similarly to adult offenders and have been punished with equal severity. In the 1800's with the Walwrick house, children began to be considered cureable and thus to some extent the concept of treatment gradually replaced the societal demand for punishment (Sanders, 1969). Treatment approaches have progressed from punitive, to custodial, to rehabilitative methods.

More recent trends have included individual counselling, behavioral management techniques, and other treatment approaches designed to increase the youths' probability of success in the community.

At present, rehabilitation predominantly takes place in a peer group setting. Cooker and Cherchia (1976) have demonstrated the efficacy of utilizing peer group treatments. Rachman and Heller (1972) have asserted that "...adolescents increase their self-esteem by their actions in the culture of a peer group." Maskiw (1976) has identified communication oriented juvenile correction programs as more effective in reducing recidivism rates in delinquent males than work oriented programs. Dannefer, Brown, and Epstein (1975) indicate that the effectiveness of verbal therapy in helping the "impulse ridden youngster" was due to the group focusing on problem solving and laying out alternatives systematically.

Another type of group treatment program that has proven effective with juveniles is recreational therapy. The use of recreational activities as treatment for the mentally or physically ill dates to at least 3000 B.C. (Lowery, 1975). Early Greek and Roman civilizations recognized the value of sports and recreation to physical and mental health and established elaborate healing temples. Thousands of years later, the rewards and advantages of physical activity and simple living are still prevalent in the writings of Rosseau and Thoreau.

Recreation therapy in the United States, prior to 1920, was a part of hospital programming and was designed primarily for the physically and mentally ill. As early as 1912, however, a movement existed within the American penal system to incorporate recreational programs into the

correctional milieu. Recreational programs provide positive experiences through cooperative pursuits. They also provide opportunities for the development of self-control, trust, and confidence in one's self and in others (Selman, 1978). Many types of activities can become recreation therapy. Some of these are: games such as football, cards, and dominoes; drama workshops; rodeos; arts and crafts such as leather working, painting, and etching; libraries; television and movies; and, more rarely--horseback riding; hiking and overnight camping; and canoeing (Kraus, 1966).

An innovative treatment program for juvenile delinquents that attempts to combine the advantages of peer group treatment with recreation therapy is wilderness therapeutic camping. Wilderness therapeutic camping totally removes the juvenile from the complex pressures of functioning in a home, school, and community setting. The wilderness setting is an unusually unique and atypical place for the juvenile delinquent. The juvenile is brought into contact with the basic reality of living--survival--by being responsible for the construction of living quarters, the preparation of meals, the maintenance of personal belongings, etc. The juvenile is given the responsibility of making life decisions and then experiencing the consequences of those decisions.

The wilderness setting also provides a practical environment for learning academic skills. Most juvenile delinquents have a history of failure in the classroom. In camp, however, they must read and write out work plans, objectives, and information requests. They must perform mathematical calculations in order to build their living structures the appropriate size and sturdiness. Also, they learn the skills of careful planning.

The constant small group interaction teaches the juvenile to interact with different personalities, to communicate openly, to control emotional outbursts and disturbances, and most importantly, to establish trust in other persons. In order to facilitate these goals, problem-solving sessions are held at the time that a problem occurs. Also at the end of each day, the group meets to evaluate that day's activities, goals, and problems.

Through these informal therapy sessions, the juvenile learns that his or her behavior affects other persons and learns to function as an individual—in control of his/her own emotions and impulses. The juvenile becomes sensitive to both self and others as s/he influences them. This group functioning capability becomes the basis from which relationships with home, school and community can be restructured (Loughmiller, 1965).

Probably the most popular and innovative of the wilderness therapeutic camping programs is the Outward Bound Program in Colorado. The Outward Bound Programs are rugged, physically challenging and occasionally dangerous. They stress team training. Programs usually include mountain walking, rappelling and rock climbing, solo survival outings, canoeing, or sailing. Instruction is provided in survival orienteering, ropes and knots, search and rescue, first aid, ecology, map reading, cooking, and firefighting. These programs usually have limited openings; are strictly voluntary; and once begun, must be completed. Also, they are successful. Kelly and Baer (1971) found that only twenty percent (20%) of an experimental group who had attended Outward Bound schools recidivated as compared to forty-two percent (42%) for the comparison group.

Reports on other wilderness therapeutic camping programs also indicate favorable results. In 1975, Hobbs and Radka reported increased incidence of positive verbal behavior both during treatment and at a one week follow-up after the use of a token economy during a short-term wilderness therapeutic camping program. Heckel, Hursh, and Hiers (1977) also reported significant results using a token-economy in which peer judgements provided the basis for award. Loughmiller (1965) reports favorable follow-up results on community adjustment for graduates of the programs at Camp Woodland Springs.

In 1977, Bailey, Faherty, Selman, and Spencer undertook an overall program evaluation of a wilderness therapeutic camping program in East Texas. The rest of this paper will be devoted to a description of the wilderness therapeutic camping program, the ensuing evaluation, and implications for the future of wilderness therapeutic camping in the remediation of juvenile delinquency.

The program investigated is called "The Crockett Therapeutic Wilderness Camp—a project of the Texas Youth Council (TYC)". It is one of twenty-six State funded wilderness camps for juvenile offenders currently operating in this country. These programs offer an innovative alternative to traditional institutional or custodial care for youth who have engaged in delinquent conduct. Depending on the perspective adopted—as to what delinquency is and how it should be corrected—the programs differ somewhat in their approaches. Regardless of their perspective, however, most programs see themselves as being a unique, rewarding, worthwhile, and challenging experience to both campers and staff. The Crockett Therapeutic Wilderness Camp is no exception.

The Crockett program was initiated in the Fall of 1975 with a handful of staff and limited support materials. Today, three separate camping areas are operating with a total capacity for 156 students and an annual budget of nearly one million dollars. The student population is comprised of Anglo, Black, and Mexican-American youths from all parts of Texas. Few, if any, students enter the program with any camping skills, or experience, though most all (after being committed to TYC custody) volunteer for the program.

Once admitted to Crockett, the camper lives in a group consisting typically of twelve students, a teacher and two groupworkers. The teacher holds a Texas Teaching Certificate and the two groupworkers usually hold Bachelor's degrees in sociology, psychology, or education. These two groupworkers are the direct service providers and live at camp with the students 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Groupworkers are generally young, the average age being 25 years. Most groupworkers have no prior experience with juvenile corrections or with group therapy techniques. The daily routines of camp life are highly demanding on both campers and staff.

Each group is, for the most part, independent of other groups. The supplies are provided; but, it is the responsibility of the group to utilize the provisions effectively. The group is responsible for the construction of their own campsite (living and eating structures are made of pine poles and canvas). Campers prepare one meal per day for themselves, with the other two being provided from a central kitchen. The youths are expected to develop and follow daily plans, these being discussed and agreed upon by the group each week. These plans explain what activity the group will be involved in during each hour of the day for an entire week. Plans generally specify times for working on

the campsite, completing school work, or recreational activities such as swimming trips, backpacking, or canoeing. The group is expected to follow their schedule as closely as possible.

The major treatment mode for handling problems in the group is the huddle-up. The huddle-up is a problem solving session in which the entire group gets together and tries to solve an existing problem of one or more campers. Anyone can call a huddle-up. Usually they are called during the early phases of an argument. In a public relations bulletin of Crockett, the huddle-up is identified as the "basic tool for positive problem solving". The same bulletin also expresses that the basic goal of the program is to instill in each camper a sense of personal responsibility and self-confidence while teaching problem solving skills.

In June 1976, the Texas Youth Council contracted with an evaluation team from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, providing funds for a comprehensive evaluation of the camping program. The basic purpose of the project was to collect and analyze data relating to staff selection and development, client progress and the program effectiveness of this therapeutic camping program. The evaluation team's main concern was to provide information which would allow the Crockett Wilderness Therapeutic Camping Program administrative personnel to make decisions aimed at improving these areas of program functioning.

In order to effectively accomplish the purposes of the project, the evaluation was segmented into four stages: (1) observation and consultation, (2) instrumentation development, (3) data collection, and (4) analysis and recommendations.

The two major objectives identified during the initial observation and consultation phase were to design a methodology for the evaluation of current program functioning, and to develop a manual detailing the issues, methods, and instrumentation which must be considered for the continuing evaluation of the program.

The instrumentation development phase of the project involved (a) the tailoring of existing evaluation techniques to improve their relevance and applicability to this relatively unique treatment setting; and, (b) the development of original instruments which utilize process measurement, outcome assessment and other modern human services evaluation techniques. The instruments developed included the Camp Observation Survey, the Job Audit Questionnaire, the Personnel Characteristics Evaluation Form, the Wilderness Management-Evaluation Questionnaire, the Psycho-Social Maturity Index, and the Terminated Staff Follow-up Questionnaire.

The Camp Observation Survey was designed to provide qualitative information concerning a wide variety of program characteristics through in-vivo observation of the campsites by the evaluation team members. Areas of particular concern included the quality of care, behavioral management, counselor modeling and compliance with external standards. A Job Audit Questionnaire was developed to determine the parameters of the administrative, training and management problems which existed in the Wilderness Therapeutic Camping program. The Personnel Characteristics Evaluation Form was developed to isolate and define the personal, professional and environmental factors contributing to program effectiveness and/or program deficiencies—it also provided a methodology for gathering data on program attributes and staff characteristics related to staff turnover. The Wilderness Management-Evaluation Questionnaire, basically a management analysis

device adapted from Likert (1967) was designed to provide quantifiable data on the role of managerial, control and decision-making processes within the program. The Psycho-Social-Maturity Index was designed to provide data on student progress. Lastly the Terminated Staff Follow-up Questionnaire provided confidential feedback and data from employees who had terminated employment with the Wilderness Therapeutic Camping program.

The data collection phases involved over one thousand (1000) hours of direct observation, assessment and interaction with program staff. All campsites were observed and rated using the Camp Observation Survey, and all instruments developed by the evaluation team were administered to currently employed agency personnel (a ninety percent (90%) return rate on these self-report instruments was obtained). A considerable number of terminated employees returned the follow-up questionnaires by mail, providing an additional perspective on program and staff characteristics. During this phase of the evaluation, the team also administered tests to the clients (including the Psycho-Social-Maturity index) designed to measure personal progress and adjustment as a function of program attributes. Over seventy-five percent (75%) of the students were tested and completed these questionnaires.

Statistical analysis of the data utilized Pearson correlation coefficients, cross comparisons of over two hundred (200) variables, and factor analysis of selected instruments. Multivariate analyses of the data was conducted by a computer programming specialist. Responses to the questionnaire items by the camping staff were compared by Sex of Employee, by Position, by Tenure (number of months employed) and by Amount of Training acquired. Subsequent analysis included the quantification of data points from which subjective or qualitative

information was available.

The results of this study provided program planners and front line staff with process and outcome information regarding staff development, client progress and the program effectiveness of the Wilderness Therapeutic Camping program. Practical recommendations were offered to aid in alleviating identifiable weaknesses in these three domains, and methodologies for ongoing evaluation were outlined. The remainder of this paper provides a brief summary of the evaluation results as they related to student progress.

Client progress was evaluated in terms of psycho-social adjustment—measured through behavioral and attudinal methods. Obvious differences were found as the juveniles progressed through the program: When a group has been in the camp less than two months, their behavior and appearance leave much to be desired. Usually between the second and third month changes begin to occur. By the end of the third month, most campers demonstrate marked improvement in terms of behavior and appearance.

Objective psychometric testing revealed changes in attitudes similar to the behavioral observations. The results showed that important changes in individual adequacy as measured by self-reliance, identity and work orientation appear to take place as the child progresses through the program. Positive changes occur over time in interpersonal adequacy as measured by enlightened trust, knowledge of major roles, and communication skills. Social adequacy as measured by openness to change, tolerance of individual and cultural differences, and social commitment also improves as the campers move through the program.

The results of the Psycho-Social Maturity Index indicated that the fourth and fifth month of the program appeared to be the time of most positive change.

The favorable results of this program evaluation of one wilderness therapeutic camping program in combination with the favorable results reported by other authors seems to indicate that wilderness therapeutic camping produces positive behavioral and attitudinal changes in juvenile delinquents. Further research is needed to designate the particular aspects of wilderness therapeutic camping that aid in remediating juvenile delinquency.

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